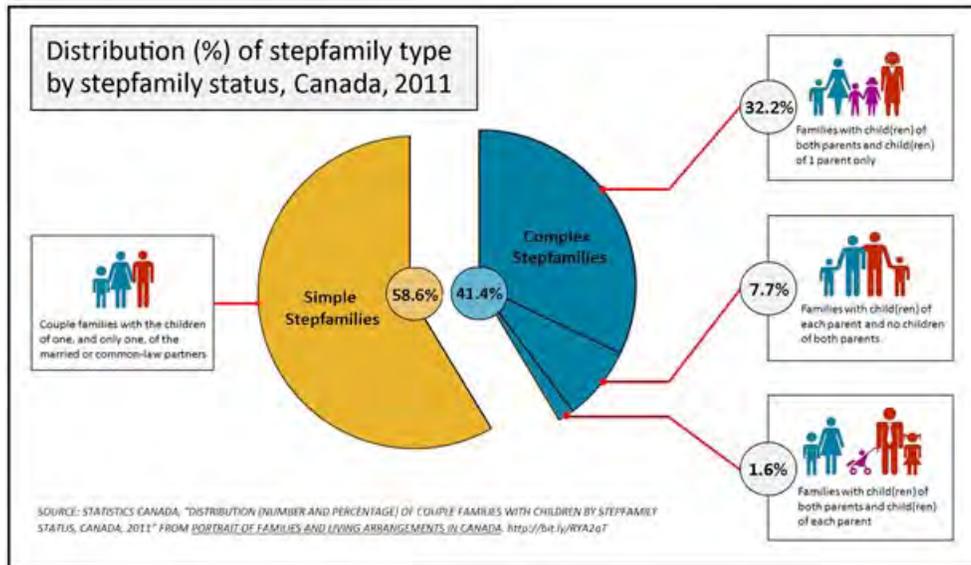


FASCINATING *Families*

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Blended Families: New challenges and opportunities



Change and diversity are the hallmarks of modern family life. Families take many forms, expanding and contracting over time as intimate relationships form, end and form anew. Nearly 1/8 of Canadian couples with children live in blended families. These families are home to more than one-half a million children under the age of 14; about 10 per cent of all those living in private households.

Popularized in the 1970's by the iconic Brady Bunch, blended families are understood as couple families with at least one child whose birth or adoption to one of the partners preceded the current relationship.¹ There are two types of blended families: simple and complex, representing 7.4% and 5.2% of all couples with children, respectively.²

According to Statistics Canada, a simple stepfamily is a couple family with children in which all children are the biological or adopted offspring of one, and only one, of the married or common-law partners. A complex stepfamily consists of any of the following: a family in which there is at least one child of both parents and at least one child of only one parent; a family in which there is at least one child of each parent; or a family in which there is at least one child of both parents and at least one child of each parent.³

Blended families are almost two times less likely to be comprised of married couples, than families wherein children are the offspring of both members of the couple. Blended families are also more than three times as prevalent among same-sex couples with children, than among opposite-sex couples with children.⁴

Family Lens

Life in a blended family brings change and provides an opportunity for new relationships with siblings, grandparents and extended family members to develop. For kids, adjusting to a more complex kinship circle can be both exciting and confusing. In most cases, it means adapting to new rules and expectations as relationships and responsibilities shift and as new patterns of communication and celebration take shape.

When blended families form, many couples find themselves navigating challenging legal and custodial issues from previous relationships while also working to understand and harmonize the needs and demands of new and existing children. These efforts are often rewarded with a larger, more diverse network of support and care that enriches the experience for everyone involved.

¹ Statistics Canada. 2012. Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada. Catalogue No. 98-312-X-2011001. Ottawa. <http://bit.ly/Qvfg4w>

² Statistics Canada. 2012. "Distribution (number and percentage) of couple families with children by stepfamily status, Canada, 2011" (table). Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada, 2011 Census. Ottawa. <http://bit.ly/OFmqEj>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Statistics Canada. 2012. Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada. Catalogue No. 98-312-X-2011001. Ottawa. <http://bit.ly/Qvfg4w>